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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

SEPTEMBER 1st, 1854.

Music in this Number.

CALM IS THE GLASSY OCEAN.

(*Placido è il mar,*)

From the Opera of "Idomenèo," Composed by MOZART.

AN ORGAN IN THE HOUSE.

(Introductory Article.)

By LEIGH HUNT.

It is curious and pleasant to consider, as an evidence both of the popularity of music, and of the rank which the spiritual portion of it gives to its mechanical agencies above all others, that the words *instrument* and *organ*, when used by themselves, or without any special intimation of a different purpose, are always understood in a musical sense. If we say "There was an instrument in the room," we mean a pianoforte: if we say an organ, we mean a church organ, or something of the kind. We cannot, for our parts, but think there is something agreeable even in the reflection, that as these two words come from the Latin and Greek, the word for the nobler instrument comes from the nobler language—organ being Greek; and a right noble word it is.

"Deep from their vaults the Loxian murmur flows,
And Pythia's awful organ peals below."

Thus writes Mr. Campbell, speaking of "Divine service" (if we may so term it) at the temple of Delphi. We know not where he found his authority for identifying the nature of the Greek church-organ with that of the organ of Milton. The Greeks, however difficult it is for us to conceive any such sense of it, possessed, we have no doubt, a music that was at once extremely different from our own and yet very beautiful; and we can suppose well enough, that they had organs in their temples, which, however different they also may have been from our own (they are described as hydraulic organs), were somehow or other very grand and effective; but no evidence exists for the appearance of the modern church organ, even in its most rudimental condition, till long after the date of the Christian era; though we should add, that even then it came from a Greek quarter, the first ascertained instrument of the kind having been sent as a present from one of the Greek emperors at Constantinople to Pepin, king of France: so that the new organ might still have risen out of the old.

Any tool may be called an instrument; but when we come to speak of organs—Greek, Latin, or English,—we either mean animated instruments, organizations of living creatures, instruments of speech, &c., or we think of the titles of

books that have moved the world—"Organons" and "Novum Organum" of Aristotle and Bacon; or, as we said before, when we mention the word alone, there rises before our mind's eye the greatest, in every sense of the word, of all instruments of music,—the organ of the church. It has been said, that instead of instrument it ought to be called a machine; and in point of size, and elaboration of construction, such a term would be better, if machinery did not bring the mechanism itself, however fine and skilful, somewhat too strongly before us. Some have not unsuitably called it a tower or turret. "Edifice" would be better than machine, were not the term confined to huger buildings; for a building or edifice the organ assuredly is—a "grand musical edifice; a shrine of itself, built up within a church."* Edification, in its original sense, literally means house-building. Hence, by metaphor, it came to mean building up a house in virtue and religion; and so, to instruct seriously in general, or to set up and furnish an example. Spenser, who like all great poets was very nice and subtle in his words, probably intended to suggest the two-fold meaning of the word, when he made use of it in the charming passage describing a hermitage:—

"A little wyde
There was an holy chappell *edifyde*,
Wherein the hermite dewly wont to saye
His holy things each morne and eventyde."

We refrain with difficulty from quoting the whole stanza, but are conscious of tending "a little wyde" of our subject. We introduced it, however, for the purpose of saying, that Spenser would very likely have been tempted to apply the word to organ-building, had he spoken of that process; and we may observe, that this very other word, "organ-building," shews what a solid and important matter of structure an organ is. The root of the word organ, like that of *energy*, is "work" (*ergon*, *opus*), and wonderful workmanship its organization is. It is full of thousands of tubes, like a living creature; and those who make it best, become famous, and have their names kept in memory.

At Weingarten, in Suabia, is an organ, the pipes of which amount to upwards of six thousand; and at Rotterdam is one a hundred and fifty feet high. Nor is less delicacy than strength required in the conditions of the organ. The critic whom we have just quoted, noticing an omission on this point in a book which has lately appeared on the subject, remarks with accordant nicety of style, that not a word is to be found in its pages "concerning the manner in which pipes are 'voiced,' or the influence exercised in the important matter of deciding the tone of the stops by the person employed for the purpose; yet all ear (he says) and taste in this matter, we have

* *Athenæum*, June 24.

always understood, are as delicate and as incommunicable as the palate of a first-class wine-taster, or that indescribable nicety of chemical mixture, which shall make the blue of one china-manufactory pure and translucent as though it was a jewel, while the blue of a rival establishment, though got up by precisely the same recipe, shall be crude, dull—impure, in short."

Organ, then, is still, and ever, the best word for this grand and truly divine instrument, which, whenever we behold it in its church, standing aloft, "shrine"-like, majestic, half dark, half golden, an object as magnificent as the voice which it is prepared to utter,—looks to us like one of the gates of heaven. When the wind gathers in the pipes, and comes streaming through them, we fancy the winds of heaven, which never rise but they utter music, blowing through the gate. Or if we hear, without seeing, the organ, and it strikes up with unusual force and suddenness, "grinding" not a "harsh," but yet solid, and as it were, something of an iron harmony,—we fancy the gate rolling back, and the winds coming pouring through, as though they were harbingers of some mighty effluence from the court and pomp of the Almighty. Should a chaunt then arise, now low, now loud, now of deeper voices, and now of voices high and young, and sounding like angels',—we feel as if heaven and earth were in communication.

"For ever and anon there roll'd
The gusty organ manifold,
Like a golden gate of heaven
On its hinges angel-driven,
To let through a storm and weight
Of its throne's consenting state,
Till the dreadful grace withdrew
Into breath serene as dew,
Comforting the ascending hymn
With notes of softest seraphim."

[See how "Love will venture in, Where it dares not well be seen;" for we have here been quoting our own verses.]

We spoke the other day of Bacon's fine comparison of the odours of flowers out of doors, when they are borne hither and thither by the wind, with the "coming and going of the warbling of music." Dante beautifully notices the like fluctuation in the sound of the chaunt in a cathedral, as the words come and go during the accompaniment of the organ:—

I' mi rivolsi, attento al primo tuono,
E *Te Deum* laudamus mi pareo
Udire in voce mista al dolce suono.
Tale immagine appunto mi rendea
Cid' ch' i' udia, qual prender si suole,
Quando a cantar con organi si stea,
Ch' or sì or no s'intendon le parole.

PURGATORIO, *Canto ix.*

I turn'd, attentive to the gathering thunder,
And thought I heard the psalm, "We praise thee, O God,"
Mingling its voice with a sweet harmony;
Ev'n as the chaunt is with the organ heard,
When now the words are caught, and now are lost.

This "thunder" (imitated by Milton) is occasioned by the opening of one of the gates in Purgatory; and it is not improbable, that the original word, *tuono*, (which in Italian is the common word for thunder), was associated, in this instance, in the poet's mind, with the meaning of its fellow-word, *tono*, which not only expresses musical tone in general, but is applied in particular to the various modes or keys in which the old ecclesiastical chaunts are performed, and which are therefore called Tones.

"I turn'd, attentive to the gathering *tone*,
And thought I heard the psalm," &c.

Would to heaven the great saturnine poet, with his gates and his thunders, had always been in so musical a frame of mind!

Chaucer has an epithet for the organ, of a nature to startle a modern reader. He calls it "merry."

"His vois was merier than the mery orgon
On massè daies, that in the chirches gon."

But we are not to take the word, as used in those days, in its limited modern acceptation. It meant animated and strong. "Merry England" was England in good hearty condition. So when the nightingale is loud, it is called merry by the same poet; and he asks whether a man can "dance merry," when he is not "mirthful;" that is to say, whether the dance can be animated, when the dancer is not in good spirits. Chaucer, like a right cheerful and religious poet, was for seeing all beautiful things in their best and happiest light; and when he heard the organ, it animated him, and made him exult.

Such also appears to have been the feeling of Spenser, who does not scruple to make the organ "roar." But then it is on his bridal day; and if the word is excessive, it is neither the less true to the spirit of an exulting triumph, nor is it used with levity, or without the prelude of a gentler tone, pious and reverent. It is the joy of having got possession of his love in the bonds of "endless matrimony," that sets him on the sudden resumption of his tone of triumph. The whole stanza is itself so fine a piece of music, and so varied like an anthem in its tone and measure, that we must give it entire,—nay, with a note or two overflowing:—

"Open the temple gates unto my Love,
Open them wide, that she may enter in,
And all the postes adorne as doth behove,
And all the pillours deck with girlands trim,
For to receyve this Saynt with honour dew,
That commeth in to you.
With trembling steps, and humble reverence,
She commeth in, before th' Almighty's view:
Of her, ye virgins, learn obedience,
When so ye come into these holy places,
To humble your proud faces:
Bring her up to th' high altar, that she may
The sacred ceremonies there partake,
The which do endlesse matrimony make;

And let the roaring organs loudly play
The praises of the Lord with lively notes,
The whiles, with hollow throates,
The choristers the joyous antheme sing,
That all the woods may answer, and their echo ring.

Behold, whiles she before the altar stands,
Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes,
And blesseth her with his two happy hands,
How the red roses flush up in her cheeks."

And so he goes on, singing and exulting, in an Epithalamium four hundred lines long, as though in anticipation of his "endless" felicity, and in vindication of his cannon-like epithet "roaring;" though his commentator, the late Rev. Mr. Todd, pronounced it to be "rather exceptionable;" and his precursor, Dr. Aikin, was of opinion that the whole noble poem, with a "few judicious curtailments," might have been rendered "a pleasing piece!" Imagine Spenser to have been requested to do such a thing! He might as well have been asked to diminish the organ itself; or to cut down one of his Elysian prospects into a suburb garden.

It is not a little remarkable that Shakspeare, with all his love of music, and the tenderness which he shewed towards the deposed Catholic faith, never even alludes to the organ, except once, and then indirectly. It is where the shipwrecked usurper of Milan, in the *Tempest*, expresses the awe and terror which he felt at the voice of thunder. The allusion alone would be sufficient to shew how grandly Shakspeare would have written about the organ:—

"Oh, it is monstrous! monstrous!
Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;
The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,
That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounced
The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass."

In this word "bass," we fear, is one of those conceits which are not always to be defended in the great poet, even upon the ground of the despairing use which affliction will sometimes unquestionably make of the language of jesting. But it completes the allusion to the organ-loft. Here were billows for *intoners*, winds for choristers, and thunder for giving out the key-note, with its dreadful bass. A tremendous commination-anthem on the waters, with a drowning crew for the audience!

The war which the Puritans waged against organs, is melancholy matter of history. Most unwise were they; renouncers of the most beautiful gifts of the Heaven which they thus strangely thought to propitiate; and authors of the melancholy resource of dram-drinking, now reigning among their descendants. For nature will struggle to see fair play somehow or other, between the grave and the gay in the constitution of human creatures; and if the right be wholly denied them, they will endeavour to make up for it, however badly, till it be restored. The critic in the

Athenæum would charitably suppose that they did not wish to banish music out of worship, but only music as practised by the monks. But they evidently had no feeling for music at all, or for anything beautiful whatsoever; and their worst qualities thus obscured their best, and made them angry and jealous at those whose perceptions were finer and happier. Bad feeling produces bad argument and bad irony. They pronounced the organ to be a "grit box o' whistles." They destroyed the beautiful painted windows in churches, on the ground of the ridiculous metaphor, that in "darkening the church, it obscured the new light of the gospel;" and yet in the teeth of this absurdity, they nevertheless absolutely proposed to Parliament that the walls of churches should be coloured black, in order "to put men in minde of that blacknesse and darknesse that is within them." Hence the whiskey-shops and dreary Sundays in Scotland, and all which afflicts every genial soul in that land of natural mountain-freedom, of poetry, and of song. Reaction might have been required in those days against excessive tendencies in a sensuous direction; but the worst of all excess is that which ultimately produces sensuality of the lowest and most reckless kind; and this is what the Puritans produced in Scotland by breaking up organs, extinguishing colours, and putting an end to dance and cheerfulness. Let us trust, however, that an improvement will come out of it all, of which they never dreamt; for an evil manifestly gross, and of some length of existence, may be necessary to the production of an abiding good. The warning will not be forgotten.

Strangely happy must Milton have felt in his declining days, however humbled in some respects, when he considered, that through all the Calvinism which he had by that time renounced, he had retained the organ which Calvinism reviled, and that he could then play upon it in a spirit which must have perplexed him while writing his denuncements of church music in his prose-works. He could now, with just comfort, not only look at the passage which he wrote about fugue-playing, in *Paradise Lost*, but enjoy most probably, over again, the whole transport which his youthful heart had experienced at the divine sights and sounds in the majesty of cathedrals.

His differences with particulars in the creed could no longer hinder him from allowing the natural and religious heavenliness of the music and the coloured light. Of the fugue in the hands of Milton we shall speak by and by. The passage in the *Penseroso*, "never to be too often quoted," cannot be left out in any effusion upon the organ.

"But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloisters pale,
And love the high-embowed roof
With antick pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light.

There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full-voic'd quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heaven before mine eyes."

The epithet "pealing" originated with Milton, and is very fine and true. It is a pity that the sound of it (which he could not help) is hardly worthy of its sense; a circumstance not usual with such English words as are intended to express powerful effects. One single word of the like sound to express three such different things as a fruit-rind, a baker's shovel, and a loud and prolonged burst of thunder, might be expected rather in a poverty-stricken language than in ours. The sound, which is short, smooth, and even, and suits the shovel admirably well, is so much the less fitted for thunder or the organ.

We do not apologize for these occasional minutenesses of criticism, into which the nature of our themes may tempt us. A musical reader will despise no inquiry into fitness and propriety of sound. Perhaps the word was originally pronounced as a dissyllable, with a broad sound on the *a*, *pe-aml*; for all vowels, we take it, had originally a distinct enunciation. What else indeed could they have been set down for?

Milton was a player on the organ and the bass-viol; and one, in all probability, of no ordinary description. His musical feeling nobody will doubt; and as his father was an accomplished amateur composer, and sons of musicians are in the way of making early acquaintance with keys and strings, the poet very likely escaped the temptation of being content with a good ear and the playing of "tunes" by rote, and so added execution to expression. Milton understood "divisions" and *floriture*—

—Notes in many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out.

Talking of meeting a friend at dinner, he proposes that they should rise from their wine

"To hear the lute well touch'd, or artful voice
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air."

He had brought manuscript music with him from Italy. (It is a pity it had not been preserved for his sake; so that we might have known where to find it, and what it was. Gray, who was a player on the harpsichord, did the same.) But the instrument of which the great poet speaks in the most emphatical manner, is the organ; and he appears to have been particularly fond of a species of composition, which at that time, and long afterwards, was in great request upon it,—the fugue. It is the only composition specified in the musical prospect which is given to Adam by the archangel:—

"He look'd, and saw a spacious plain, whereon
Were tents of various hue; by some, were herds
Of cattle grazing; others, whence the sound
Of instruments, that made melodious chime,
Was heard of harp and organ; and who moved
Their stops and chords was seen: his volent touch,
Instinct through all proportions, low and high,
Fled and pursued, transverse, the resonant fugue."

In his treatise on *Education* Milton recommends that the interval between exercise and dinner should be occupied in performing or listening to "solemn and divine harmonies of musick; either while the skilful organist plies his grave and fancied descant in lofty fugues, or the whole symphony with artful and unimaginable touches adorn and grace the well-studied chords of some choice composer; sometimes the lute, or soft organ-stop, waiting on elegant voices, either to religious, martial, or civil ditties; which, if wise men and prophets be not extremely out, have a great power over disposition and manners, to smooth and make them gentle from rustic harshness and distempered passions."

But as this passage brings us to our main intended subject, the *Organ in the House*, which would lead us too far for the limits of a single article, we here stop for the present; observing only, that from the days of Milton to the present century, we can call to mind no poet who spoke worthily of the organ, till Wordsworth uttered his fine epithet of—

"Pomp and threatening harmony."

Every lover of the organ will recognize the truth and grandeur of that expression. Not that the organ threatens always when it is grand or loud, or that it threatens at any time in a spirit unworthy of its divineness; but there is often, nevertheless, a tone in its force and volume, to which the word is true, and before which every unworthy or presumptuous feeling should stand rebuked.

CHOIR AND CHORUS SINGING.

(Continued from page 151.)

59. Sibilants of different kinds should be also the objects of special study. The mechanism of the sibilant acts in three ways in singing as in speaking. In the first, it results from the movement of the tongue towards the teeth: it is by this mechanism that those syllables which have *s* or *z* for the first consonant are sounded. In the second, the air is pushed, as it were, between the lips at the moment of their parting, as in all syllables in which *f* or *ph* precede the vowel. In the third, the sound comes from the back of the mouth, and the air is compressed between the tongue and the palate:—

(Continued on page 167.)